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ABSTRACT

The use of videotapes in college-level Hebrew instruction is discussed. A distinction is made between (1) prerecorded materials, commercially produced or educational, and (2) student-produced programs. The advantages, problems, and purposes of the use of each type of tape are explored. An introductory level instructional tape series and commercial Israeli movies are used as examples of prepared programs, and the example of student-developed tape production is the adaptation of a television commercial. The materials discussed are in Hebrew, but the principles are applicable to instruction in any language. (MSE)

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VIDEO IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Rina Donchin[1]

This paper describes the use of video in instruction in college-level Hebrew. The paper is based on experience accumulated during the past decade. A distinction is made between the use of pre-recorded programs, commercial as well as educational, and video programs produced by the students. The purposes for which each of these modes can be used is discussed and evaluated. Though all the projects and programs are in Hebrew, the way it has been used could apply to any other language. Video is a powerful aid. A few minutes of video material can serve as a basis for instructional activity of an entire class period.

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INTRODUCTION

For the past decade I have increasingly relied on video recordings in my classes. I teach college-level Modern Hebrew and my classes range across all levels of instruction, from the beginner to the fluent speaker. In this paper I will review and evaluate different modes in which I have utilized this medium. Used properly, video can be a very effective instructional tool. If student enthusiasm can be used as a measure of the success of an instructional technique, then video is an extraordinarily successful tool with tremendous utility in language teaching. Indeed, in my experience the video projects were unique in their ability to motivate students to devote to the language many hours beyond their class time. My students have devoted much time in cooperative team efforts designed to prepare video projects. Indeed, it was the infectious enthusiasm of the students that provided me with the motivation to explore the possibilities of this medium.

I have used video in two main ways. I have had the students watch pre-recorded materials and I have allowed students to create and record their own programs. In the following sections I will review each of these, explain the procedures I followed, and discuss the merits of the different approaches.

VIEWING PREPARED PROGRAMS

There are several sources of pre-recorded video material in Hebrew. I will focus here on a series of 19 programs entitled *Hebrew with Siman Tov*. The programs were prepared by The Ministry of Education and Culture, Instructional Television Center, and Everyman's University in 1974. I shall also discuss the use we made of video cassettes of commercial, general release, Israeli movies. These are available in Hebrew, some of them with English sub-titles. Of course, much more material is available in Israel. However, due to an incompatibility between the video systems used in Israel and in the USA one must either possess a multistandard playback machine or restrict oneself to Hebrew material prepared especially to the technical specifications of the American system.

The Siman Tov Sequence

The series consists of 19 episodes, all prepared for beginners with a vocabulary of about 1,000 words. The 19 episodes, each lasting 25 minutes, are related to one another only through the main characters. These include

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Siman Tov, a very Israeli travel guide who likes to be helpful; and Siman Tov's secretary, Avivit, a typical young Israeli woman. The name "Siman Tov", incidentally, means in Hebrew "good omen". Thus in Hebrew the phrase "Hebrew with Siman Tov" refers both to the series protagonist but also to the student's good fortune while studying Hebrew. The material is replete with such nuggets of incidental learning.

Each episode in the series is an independent unit. It can therefore be viewed out of order, depending on the needs of the learners. In each of the programs in the series, the viewer is exposed to a variety of situations of cultural and social relevance, as well as to native speakers of Hebrew who use the language in its natural context. Each episode focuses on a small number of grammatical points and these are illustrated explicitly and implicitly in the material. Consider, for example, an episode that attempts to convey the use of the imperative. The story brings a group of young tourists to a military camp. They are mistaken by the Sergeant Major for new recruits. It is only natural for the officer to keep yelling different commands at the tourists. That the tourists naturally refuse provides an excellent opportunity for illustration of the negation of the imperative.

Most of the grammar presented in the series is syntactic in nature and most of the points made are so basic that learners would have acquired them before they have a vocabulary of 1,000 words. Thus the main purpose of the program is in its providing for a basic review of syntactic structures. Each episode presents about 50 new words (Rabin 1975).

Use of Siman Tov

The *Siman Tov* series served me in several different levels of Hebrew teaching, but its main use has been at the fifth semester of the student's program. By that time the student has acquired the basic ideas of the grammar and can read literature in simplified Hebrew.

In this context the *Siman Tov* series served in the following ways:

1. It provided enrichment material to supplement textbook units. For example, our students study stories written by A. Meged (1970 1972) which focus on village life in the Kibbutz and the Moshav. These communal, and cooperative, modes of life are somewhat foreign to the student. However, one of the *Siman Tov* programs entitled "A Fine Fellow" takes place in part in a Moshav and thus it provides the students with an experience of this world in the visual mode. The students can actually watch Moshav people in action as they go about their daily life. This illustrative material is very entertaining and is watched by the students with delight. Students exposed to *Siman Tov* require considerably fewer explanations from the teacher as they encounter Meged's work.
2. It enriched the presentations made by students as part of their class discussion. These presentations are short lectures (5-10 minutes) about subjects of interest to the students. It is only natural that considerable time and thought is given to the problems of young people on campus or after graduation. The students are, in general, very curious about the problems of their counterparts in Israel. Of course, it is the task of the teacher to provide the information. It is, however, much more dramatic to watch the *Siman Tov* program "A Life of Peace", and to see how "they really act and exercise their freedom."
3. Its illustrations reinforced grammatical points. We all know how boring and irrelevant it feels when one has to learn grammar by the conventional methods. Through *Siman Tov* the correct mode of questions concerning time are learned through the story of Aunt Batya, who disappeared during World War II and is sought by her 50-year-old American nephew (e.g. "How long has it been since you have seen Aunt Batya?"), and the Noun/Adjective agreement is introduced while Siman Tov helps Mr. Goralnick find the right spouse for the very tall Moshav teacher.
4. It served as a source that allowed students to experience Israeli culture: male-female attitudes, bureaucracy, parents and children, and many other aspects of what is and what is not proper in human

relations in the Israeli society. Of course, it can be learned from other sources, but the *Siman Tov* episodes succeed in delivering the main point quickly, efficiently and effectively.

5. It was a source of paralinguistic information. Watching a person talk communicates much more than just listening or reading (Lonergan 1984). It is not just the choice of words in the scene at the post office in "A Life of Peace" that enables the student to experience going to the post office in Israel. It's the tone, the intonation, the distance between people, the way they ask, and the way they express gratitude. *Siman Tov*, like any Israeli movie, can instruct the students in the Israeli body language which is an integral part of communication in the language with its native speakers.

A typical sequence with which the *Siman Tov* material was used involved the following. We began with a review of that vocabulary which is essential for following the story, usually not more than 10 nouns, 10 verbs and about the same number of "others", including idioms and expressions. The learner was prepared for what was about to be presented on the screen. Only then did we watch the video program. The watching was followed by class discussions. Students were allowed as many out-of-class viewings of the program as was practical. This sequence was followed by different activities that were based on the program. The specific activities depended on the level of the students and the wider contexts, and included, for example, using the story as a model for a role play, and inviting a specialist Israeli guest to talk about the same subject.

COMMERCIAL FILMS

Unlike the *Siman Tov* video tapes that were prepared expressly for the language learner, the movies I have used were produced for exhibition in commercial theaters. They vary in quality, but are in all cases equipped with plot, characters, and often music. These movies can be used as a source of cultural enrichment. However, this is not their sole purpose. The movies are valuable as a basis for conversations and discussions.

Whenever I used such movies the students viewed the movie as a sequence of short scenes. In a way, I converted each movie to a "Siman Tov" sequence. Each scene was treated as a "mini-unit" of studying. After the scene was presented, the students reconstructed its content, discussed it, summarized the main points, and tried to guess what would happen next. Vocabulary was explained only if it was essential. Comprehension was possible because of the context and because the plot was quite simple and predictable. The discussion and its summary were always followed by a second showing of the scene. This review was intended to clear up points that were not fully understood the first time, and so it would reinforce comprehension. Sometimes the discussion focused on the difference between the way the plot actually developed and how the students expected it to develop. Occasionally it was proper, following an episode, to write and act out dialogues based on the scene.

The advantage of the commercial movies over the *Hebrew with Siman Tov* is their authenticity. They were made for Israelis, not for learners of Hebrew. There is, on one hand, much satisfaction for the learners as they discover that they can understand a "real" movie. On the other hand, there is a genuine interest in differences between the student's culture and that revealed in the movie. I have used the films in the fourth and fifth semester. I have used one or two films each semester. It is remarkable how much the students can gather from the context of a movie even when their competence is marginal. However, when showing commercial movies, I have used the stop button much more frequently with the commercial film than with *Hebrew with Siman Tov*. Language learners need help, guidance, and reassurance. It can be provided by constant checking of comprehension. The movies were used more for their communicative value than for the conventional "film watching" activity.

PREPARING PROGRAMS

Introduction

The use of movies as supplementary material is an obvious utilization of this medium. However, it does not utilize to the full the power of video. In my experience, the most exciting aspect of the technology is that it allows the recording, and the immediate viewing, of interactions between students as well as of dramatic materials written and produced by the students. Indeed, my most striking use of video consists of assigning projects to the students. The projects are carried out by students at all levels, from the first to sixth semesters. I will enumerate and discuss different projects, some of which we have used here at Illinois. Others I have seen in use in other universities. This is, of course, not an exhaustive list.

List of Projects

First year:

1. Monologues presented by individuals talking about themselves, families, life on campus, friends, plans for the summer, visits to places of interest. The choice of subject is determined by the student. The recording is done in the middle and at the end of the semester.
2. Dialogues about the same subjects were also carried out twice during the semester. Here there was more room for improvisation and acting.
3. Acting out folk stories such as "Little Red Riding Hood", and "The Three Little Pigs".

Second Year:

1. News bulletins with sections on University news, Israeli matters, holidays, Israeli cooking, "Dear Abby", games, and so on.
2. Formal debates.
3. Interviewing Israeli students. We do two presentations in second year, one in each semester.

Third Year:

1. Preparing an original "Hebrew with Siman Tov".
2. Formal debates.
3. Interviewing native speakers of Hebrew.

Preparation of Projects

Before preparing a project the students watched samples of video material prepared by students in previous years. This prior exposure served to motivate the students and assured them that the task is "doable". Furthermore, they gathered from watching previous products that mistakes are tolerable and that their accent does not interfere with the success of the project. Whenever we prepared a project, the students were required to prepare the script in writing. The script was always reviewed and corrected by me, with the student, before it could be used for filming. This practice was derived from the difficulties I encountered when in the first year I used video I recorded spontaneous conversations, dialogues, and skits. This turned out to be too embarrassing and unpleasant an experience to the students. I have found that careful advanced preparation is welcome by the students who seem to be willing to do just about anything to get "on camera". While in part the preparation for recording is done in class, most of the effort does not require class time.

The actual recording is done outside the class as the students can gain access to the equipment. In this manner the material can be recorded many times until the student has a tape that can be exhibited to the class. Only after the student is satisfied do I review the tape with the student. The final "product" is shown in class, with the student's permission. It happens, but very rarely, that a student does not want to see himself on TV. It happens, even more rarely, that students don't want their program to be shown. All these projects are not obligatory; there is always something else that can be carried out, reaching about the same goal. Whatever is recorded on video tape reflects the interests and needs of the students at a particular stage.

The pedagogical aims of each exercise are explained to the students. We are all working together on themes that are relevant and interesting. It provides the students with excellent feedback about their language performance and competence. Moreover, as there is continuity, it provides a longitudinal view on the student's progress in communicative skills. Review and evaluation, which is a very important part of each project, is carried out as one out of many steps towards producing the final skit, monologue, etc. It is done in an atmosphere of cooperation, not "mistake-correcting" or grading. This emphasis on team work, either teams consisting entirely of students or teams in which the teacher also participates, is one of the main assets of working on video programs. Superior learning is achieved when the learner is completely absorbed in the communicative aspect of learning. Working on video projects is not only a good way of reaching such involvement, it also has the advantage of leaving a tangible residue after the project is finished to view, enjoy, let others enjoy, and be able to go back and watch many months after.

PREPARING HEBREW TEXTS FOR PREPARED PROGRAMS

Finally, let me describe a use of video that utilized commercial films but emphasized student participation. In this mode the students are provided with video material in their native language. Their task is to prepare a new audio track for the video material. This audio track is, of course, in the language they are studying. The idea derived from the fact that it is not possible to use in the USA video material aired in Israel because of the difference between the American and the Israeli video-recording systems. Thus, we could not meet the student's need for additional materials by using tapes that were originally prepared in Hebrew.

However, we began to accumulate a variety of U.S.-origin video material that was taped for use as cultural materials. As we began to use this in the mode described in this section, we began collecting TV commercials. The language of commercials is usually very simple and easy to understand by people who don't have a rich vocabulary. It can be translated into Hebrew, recorded, and mixed with the videotape. Of course, not every advertisement is appropriate. We found that it is particularly useful to choose commercials in which the speaker is not shown in the picture, only the product or the action. The narrator is using, in these commercials, a voice-over technique informing the viewer of the virtues of the advertised product. The advertisements have to be, of course, suitable to the subject matter covered at the time of the project. Furthermore, it helps if the students find the commercial enjoyable. There must be, therefore, a preliminary stage of recording many advertisements, screening them, and copying the more suitable material.

The procedure we used was as follows. The commercial was first exhibited without the sound and the students (either in pairs or alone) were asked to create a Hebrew text. They then tried to synchronize the text with the picture and made adjustments to allow the right timing. Recording the new audio track on the video tape was done in the studio, not at class time. As there were several texts for each advertisement, we chose the most popular text. It is a good project for learning points in grammar, for example, conditionals, general statements, imperatives, etc. As a bonus, the students learn the language of TV, its distinctive features, and the ways Hebrew differs from English in this particular case. Other TV programs that can be adapted to Hebrew are travelogues or commentaries in which most of the program is narrated.

In second year Hebrew, we adapted a program about children in the Kibbutz. Most of the work in this case was done outside of class as an Honors project. The English text was translated into a much shorter, simplified Hebrew. (As there is no direct speech in this program, it does not get out of synchrony.)

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Video tapes can be used in as many ways as the imagination of the teacher and the students allow. It should be remembered, though, that the medium has to be treated as any other aid in teaching or learning. There should be concrete learning aims and viewing has to be guided. Feedback and evaluation should be an integral part of using video; it should not be overused; and finally, unlike many other aids to learning, the programs that are made by students should be carried out in full cooperation. Many students are quite hesitant in the beginning about using the equipment and about appearing on the TV screen. Full cooperation can help overcome these problems, and of course, the reassurance that there are competent technicians ready to help at any time. The success of early simple projects enabled us to move to more complex ones later on. The success in one class motivated other classes to participate in the "fun".

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